



University of the
West of England



**ESRC seminar series: Social experiences of breastfeeding:
building bridges between research and policy**

9 June 2016: Breastfeeding, the media and popular culture.

Speaker abstracts and biographies.

Fiona Giles

Narcissism gone nuts or 'empowering exhibitionism'? Brelfies, popular culture and breastfeeding's burgeoning publics

Both acclaimed and derided as the 'number one parenting trend of 2015' (Carlton 2015), brelfies — or selfies taken by mums while breastfeeding — have made a controversial new addition to popular culture representations of breastfeeding. This paper explores the potential of brelfies to claim public domains for breastfeeding, and how this might contribute to the acceptance of breastfeeding in other contested public spaces, such as on public transport, in shopping areas, parks, restaurants and elsewhere. I will also consider other forms of user-generated media in the cybercultural environment, such as Youtube postings, blogs and vlogs, and women's independently produced media. As an activity that has been represented as 'alternately erotic and abject' (Beuskens 2015), breastfeeding in popular culture occupies a contested space veering between sensationalism and piety. Overall, does the exposure of varieties of breastfeeding assist in normalizing the practice, or has it merely played to the ratings? A meta-analysis of studies exploring attitudes to breastfeeding in public might show if there has been an increase in acceptance since breastfeeding's lowest point (at 22%) in 1972 (Eckhardt and Hendershot 1984). In light of the proliferating audiences and genres for representing breastfeeding, might it also be fruitful to shift our thinking from the problem of breastfeeding in public, to exploring breastfeeding and its many publics?

Biography

Fiona Giles is a senior lecturer in the department of media and communications, University of Sydney. She has written on breastfeeding and culture for general, professional and academic audiences. Her crossover book, *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts* (2003) provided narrative accounts of experiences of breastfeeding within sociocultural contexts that enabled a queering of breastfeeding so that it could begin to be viewed outside practical and polemical frameworks, understood as part of the social life of adults and children, and accepted as belonging on the spectrum of maternal sexuality. Her most recent publication is the Introduction to *Where's the Mother: Stories of a Transgender Dad*, by Trevor McDonald (2016), which relates his breastfeeding experiences after giving birth as a transgender male who'd undergone chest surgery prior to becoming pregnant. Fiona's academic publications have focused on the importance of utilising pleasure to promote breastfeeding, moving away from the idealised, virtuous, breastfeeding mother in order to acknowledge the sexual, social and aesthetic values and benefits of this complex bio-social practice. She is currently researching a book tentatively titled *The Everyday Aesthetics of Breastfeeding*.

Abigail Locke

Parenting ideologies, infant feeding and the media

Infant feeding remains a highly emotive and politicised topic with a variety of perspectives coming from conflicting standpoints. In this seminar, I bring together different strands of debate around infant feeding, drawing on ideas across the social and health sciences in order to explore some of the key points of tension. These points include media representations of infant feeding, health promotion discourses within a 'neoliberalist' society, and the impacts of contemporary parenting ideologies on parenting practices and parenting subjectivities. Taking a critical social/health psychological perspective, rather than offering definitive answers, I look to reaching a deeper understanding of the ways in which competing discourses around what it means to be a good parent and how we feed our infants become operationalised in these different standpoints. This seminar provides the opportunity to discuss some of these, often polarised perspectives, in the same context, offering contemporary examples to do so.

Biography

Abigail Locke is a critical social psychologist whose research work specialises in issues around gender, parenting, identity and health. She has a particular interest in what society constructs as 'good' mothering and 'good' fathering and has applied this to a variety of topics including infant feeding, 'older' mothers, and fathers in primary caregiving roles. Abigail is currently Professor of Psychology at the University of Bradford, and Visiting Professor in Social and Health Psychology at the University of Derby, both in the UK. Abigail has previously held academic positions at the Universities of Loughborough, Huddersfield, Derby and Coventry.

Catherine Angell:

Mixed Messages: Media representations of infant feeding

Infant feeding might logically be assumed to be a personal and functional activity, arousing little interest in those not immediately engaged in it. However, many people hold strong opinions about the ways in which babies should be fed, and how and where feeding should happen (Thomson et al. 2015). Women frequently identify the expectations of their family, social group and culture as strong influences on their infant feeding decisions and behavior (Angell 2011). A key aspect in this is the mass media, which provides a conduit through which public opinion around infant feeding is presented, debated and potentially sculpted (Henderson et al 2000). During the past two decades a small body of research has emerged, which has explored how infant feeding is presented in newspapers, magazines and television, in a range different countries and cultures. A number of recurring themes have emerged from this, all of which commonly involve 'mixed messages'. This presentation will explore these themes, illustrating them with specific examples from research that identified infant feeding representations in English national newspapers.

Biography

Catherine Angell is Principal Academic for Midwifery at Bournemouth University. Her main areas of professional interest are the social and cultural influences on infant feeding and parenting choices. Catherine's PhD study used innovative research methods to explore infant feeding education in primary schools. This provided new insights into the development of infant feeding ideas during childhood, as well as identifying possibilities for developing effective education programmes for younger children. More recently Catherine has researched media representations of infant feeding, focusing on national newspapers in England. In her education role Catherine has helped develop the infant feeding elements in Bournemouth University's BFI accredited Midwifery programmes. She also co-developed BURP, the University's online infant feeding education programme, which is widely used by midwives and other staff in a number of UK Trusts. She has published research exploring midwifery student's experiences of learning about infant feeding, and is co-researching student experiences of working with mentors during breastfeeding support.

Shantini Paranjothy:***Mam-Kind: A UK feasibility study of motivational interviewing based peer-support for breastfeeding maintenance***

Evidence from low and middle income countries suggests that breastfeeding peer-support (BFPS) increases the number of mothers who continue breastfeeding, but previous UK-based BFPS studies have not shown similar effects. Current guidance for health service providers does not specify how to provide effective support to new mothers in the UK to help them continue breastfeeding for longer. Funded by the NIHR HTA, the Mam-Kind study has developed a new BFPS intervention that uses a motivational interviewing (MI) approach to help mothers who are young or live in disadvantaged areas to continue breastfeeding for longer. The project is currently testing the feasibility of delivering this intervention. MI is a form of counselling that supports people in changing behaviour by exploring their thoughts and concerns and supporting them in setting their own goals. This approach has not previously been used in BFPS but has been successful in other areas, including peer outreach for young people with HIV. The presentation will give an overview of the Mam-Kind project, approach to intervention development and progress to date.

Biography:

Shantini Paranjothy is Professor of Preventive Medicine and Co-Director of the Division of Population Medicine at Cardiff University's School of Medicine. Shantini 's research is focussed on perinatal and infant health inequalities and she is the Chief Investigator of the NIHR HTA funded study that aims to develop and test the feasibility of a motivational interviewing based peer-support intervention for breastfeeding maintenance in the UK. Shantini is also the Scientific Lead for HealthWise Wales (www.healthwisewales.gov.wales), a national initiative funded by Health and Care research Wales to engage large numbers of people in Wales with health and social care research.